

Expert discusses the science of commitment

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Credit: Lynn Greyling/Public Domain

During the month of February, couples usually take time to think of all the meaningful ways to show their love and affection toward each other. But what does it take to make that love last? One Baylor College of Medicine expert explains what commitment means and offers tips on maintaining a successful relationship.

"I think part of what it means to be committed is giving your word to somebody and keeping your word," said Dr. James Bray, associate

professor of family and community medicine at Baylor and family psychologist. "When we give our word and keep our word we have integrity, and in order to be committed that's what you have to do."

But even before making a commitment, Bray said that couples need to have a discussion and come to a clear understanding about what exactly it means when they say 'I'm committed to you.'

For those who may be afraid to commit, Bray explains this fear could stem from some earlier life experiences.

"One reason people can be afraid to commit is because they grew up in a divorced home. They don't want to get married and have a divorce themselves. Another reason may be because they were in a hurtful relationship before and they don't want to be committed and have that happen again. It is a good idea to take a look at these kinds of experiences that might be preventing you from being able to make that commitment," Bray said.

Besides wanting to commit, there are other characteristics that contribute to the success of a relationship Bray said. These include love, trust and having the same values and interests.

For those looking to improve their relationships and marriages, Bray has a few tips.

- Communicate effectively. It is important for couples to be able to do this so that they can both clearly express themselves while also being sensitive to their partner's feelings.
- Create positive experiences rather than negative ones. Research has found that in happy marriages for every negative event that occurred between the couple there are about five positive events. In unhappy marriages, it was one to one. Remember that

something as simple as putting the toilet paper on the right way or squeezing the tooth paste at the end rather than in the middle can be seen as a positive and make a big difference.

- Learn how to resolve conflicts. Another result that long-term research on happy marriages found is that people in happy marriages have conflicts. It is not that they do not argue or get upset with each other but it's that they resolve conflicts in a way that is acceptable for each other. They don't avoid discussing issues but instead, they talk about them and come to resolutions.
- Nurture your relationship. This can be very challenging given that people have so many demands. However, for those who want to have a happy relationship and continue that long term, they need to spend time with each other doing positive things that each of them like.

As for the saying 'never go to bed' angry, Bray said that following this advice can in some cases harm a [relationship](#).

"If you are so angry that you can't have a reasonable, rational conversation with your significant other, it is better not to continue the conversation because what will likely happen if you continue is that you will say something hurtful that you don't mean," Bray said.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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